

Ed Fratini, as told to Maxine Kortum Durney, Petaluma,
Jan 18 1990.

There were literally hundreds of chicken ranches around here. I grew up in East Petaluma and remember how it was in the morning: you could hear the cackling, the chickens, like a wave of sound coming toward you.

Typically a poultryman had a thousand to three thousand chickens, a couple of cows, a pig, a horse. A horse drawn wagon to go to town once a week. A vegetable garden, a dug well. No electricity, no gas.

No telephone. Then later there were eight or ten independent telephone companies, little companies, that would ask for subscribers, such as the Lakeville Telephone Company, or the Red Hill.

The daybook of the Western Refrigerator Company - built by Burdell - is at the Museum. They took in milk and eggs, gave the farmer a tag, even for a dozen or so eggs. We lived on that side, we'd bring in our milk. They'd test it and give us a tag, and pay us once or twice a month. The daybook shows hundreds of little entries like that.

I remember D. W. Bachelor, in real estate, he opened up Cotati. He said if you had 3000 dollars you could buy the land, build a house, build chicken houses and buy the chickens.

You would get mixed baby chicks to raise [before the advent of the sexed chicks]. The broilers [cockerels raised to a certain weight, for eating] were supposed to pay the feed bill. There were several poultry buying stations in town, one was Agius, one was Drees; Dodge Sweeney and Co. had an egg buying station. People would bring their eggs and chickens to town to sell on Saturday. Hitching racks at McNears and at Hill Plaza were filled up on Saturdays.

There were several slaughter houses in town where people could bring their veal calves. One was in back of the present Gilardi's furniture store. The calves' throats were cut, bled, and the insides taken out, then kept overnight and the next morning thrown like cordwood on a freight car, probably the baggage car. Some live chickens went that way, in coops, but mostly they went to the San Francisco market on wagons.

We lived in East Petaluma and I remember during the summer the haying scene. A two horse team would pull a wagon with 16 to 19 bales; These were five wire bales, eight bales to the ton. They came from Lynch Ranch, from Kelsey, Frates...

Hay was hauled for months. When they loaded the hay at the ranches they would roll bales together to make steps, and they would put bales at the front of the wagon higher, five bales high, then pulled them back on top of the others to finish the load.

The roads out there in East Petaluma were sprinkled with water to keep the dust down. There were wells out there with a capstan for drawing the water. A horse was hitched to the capstan, would go round and round, to fill a tank on a wagon. When they were short of water they would pump from creek, and toward the end of summer the roads would have a cover of white film, which was salt.

McNears, where I worked for two years (before I went to the bank) had a delivery system, with horse and wagon, a system that McNear's advertised. Later they had trucks. A minute off the gravel road they mired down. After World War I they brought trucks from France; chain driven; but the tires fragile. Later yet they had Clivers trucks with pneumatic tires.

Roads were not gravelled. A slippery spot was Meacham Hill, where the spring crossed the road. The well house is still there, above Stony Point Road.

Horse drawn tank wagons carried diesel to ranches, from Union Oil and Standard Oil. At Standard Oil there were four-horse and two-horse wagons. I can remember the two-horse wagon going up Washington street, at the hill, a full load. The narrow wheels would sink into the asphalt. Now, these days, you could put a watch under a tire and it wouldn't be harmed. Once up the hill and out a little ways they could begin to unload, the load got lighter. They were carrying diesel, and maybe kerosene, to heat the brooder houses.

Grains came by scow schooners. The grain was grown in the San Joaquin Valley on what we called "the islands", where the little scow schooners could draw up to pick up the sacks. Trains brought in grain from the East, also in sacks. It all had to be unloaded. We counted 8 times that a bag was handled before it got to the farmer.

There was a local freight car that took orders to 22 stations between here and Santa Rosa, one every mile. It was the electric Red, built in 1904. Carried passengers and freight, every day.

In my time there were four double tracks. Everything had to be drayed over to this, the west side of town. By 1923 the Petaluma and Santa Rosa electric railroad was built. There was a switch by Bridge street, and it went behind...There was a bridge at Hopper street, a trestle for the electric railroad. It went along border street to McNear's, then to Water street to Whitney warehouse, then to Vonsen's, then to McNear's warehouses.

Now it goes to Bar Ale, there is some law that requires that the railroad continue such service. Bar Ale can hold them to it.

Steamers were the extension of the Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railroad. In San Francisco if you took merchandise to the steamer at 5 PM, it arrived here in Petaluma during the night, was unloaded and put on railroad cars for Forestville, Two Rock, Hessell, Sebastopol, and Santa Rosa. There were individual cars, one for the Forestville run, one for Two Rock, two for Santa Rosa. Next morning the little train, like a local freight car, made the trip. There were 22 stations between here and Santa Rosa, every mile or so there was a station. I worked at McNears, and we would put McNear orders on those cars. The train carried passengers as well as freight. In 1912 or so there were 2500 people a day travelling, many of them students.

The railroad station was built in 1914, the same year they continued the track to Eureka. The railroad had gardeners who came once a week from Tiburon, bringing flowers in flats. Gardeners would leap out of the car, refurbish the gardens at the depot.

There were eight or ten trains a day, each heralded with a signal man..there were no flashing lights. At the station the conductors would get off, go into the station, I guess sign a book, emerged with orders for the engineer and the brakeman, which they had to sign.

The morning train had cream cars, cream brought all the way from Ferndale.

When the station was built it was natural for Petaluma to fix up Washington street all the way into town. They installed electric lights in clusters, and called Washington "The Great White Way". Continental Hotel on Western, and American Hotel, where Putnam Park is now, sent omnibuses to the station to pick up drummers and others. Earlier, hacks, which were horse drawn taxis, were sent to the station.

Farmers raised quite a bit on their farms, but the farmers were perennially short of money. Old timers would say "My son isn't going to have to do this."

When I started out at the bank I was a teller. At that time you weren't asked to pay interest once a month. It was 6% on a thousand dollars, \$5.00 a month. About 1933 the bank began asking that the loan itself be paid off at 1% a month. I remember one rancher who protested paying off his \$1500 loan, but when it was paid said "Why didn't you make me do that before?".

We had to have the knowledge. We did it by getting financial statements. We had to know the cost of diseases.

There were sad cases. I remember our saying, to someone who wanted to borrow money to get into the chicken business, "You haven't the experience..." He was angry. "You know what I've done in my life.... this, and....., and....., I can take care of chickens!!"

City loses local historian

Etalo Edward Fratini, a native son who chronicled the history of Petaluma on a 1915 Royal typewriter that was still a wondrous new invention when he was growing up here, died Monday at a local convalescent hospital after a brief illness. He was 91.

As one of Petaluma's "grand old men," Fratini helped preserve the history of the community he called home since moving here shortly after his birth in Guerneville in 1902.

"He was one of the most delightful men I ever met," said



Fratini

Petaluma Mayor Patty Hilligoss.

One of six children born to Italian immigrant parents, he grew up near Kenilworth Park on the edge of town when it was still surrounded by hay fields. The Petaluma of his youth was "a sedate country town" with cobblestone streets, watering troughs and no cars. As a teen, Fratini delivered milk in his neighborhood and later hawked the *Saturday Evening Post* at the railroad station.

He played on the first Petaluma football team in 1924 and worked for George P. McNear, a pioneer of the local poultry industry.

He graduated from Petaluma schools and attended Sweet's

(See Fratini, page 12A)

(Continued from page 1)

Business College in Santa Rosa. In 1938, Fratini married Lillian Mezzerra, who died in December. For 46 years, he worked as a banker and retired as assistant manager of Wells Fargo's Petaluma branch in 1967.

His contributions as a civic leader spanned seven decades. He was the founder of the Petaluma Historical Society, past president of the Petaluma Lion's Club and the Chamber of Commerce, former chairman of the Sonoma County Red Cross, and a member of numerous civic groups.

In 1976, the City Council designated him as Petaluma's official historian.

"He was a lovely man," say Evangeline Ruiz, assistant coordinator at the Petaluma Historical Museum. "He was brilliant, inquisitive, well-read and well-versed in Petaluma history. He could tell you something about every spot in the town."

For years, Fratini worked and researched at the historic 100-year-old, two-story Victorian near D Street where he had lived since 1933. But he never subscribed to what he called "the good old day theory."

"The good old days are now," he told a reporter a couple of years ago.

While his passion for local history will be remembered as his lasting legacy, Fratini enjoyed many other pastimes. He loved to travel and studied foreign languages. His favorite language was Esperanto, an artificial language derived from various European languages. One of his most prized possessions was a magazine from China published in Esperanto.

He also was an avid runner and once managed the Petaluma Spartans running club. He competed in nearly 20 Bay-to-Breakers races in San Francisco. He ran his last race at age 78.

Hilligoss remembered that for several years Fratini played Santa Claus at the Petaluma Plaza after

she asked him to do it.

"He was a great Santa Claus," she said. "He was just so nice that the kids all loved him. He could talk to them — he could talk to anybody — without lording over them".

Fratini is survived by his daughter Edwardine Chalk of Huntington Beach; his sisters, Brena Fratini and Nellie Fratini of San Francisco; his brother Lino

Fratini of Santa Rosa, and a niece, Betty Jo Reich of Petaluma.

Funeral services were held this morning at Parent-Sorensen Mortuary in Petaluma, followed by a Mass celebrated at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church. Burial was at Calvary Cemetery.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Petaluma Library, the Petaluma Historical Museum, or a favorite charity.